

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief Lowell M. Porter



Office of the State Fire Marshal **State Fire Marshal Mary Corso**

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Juvenile Firesetting: The Preventable Arson

Each year billions of dollars worth of property is destroyed and hundreds of people are killed due to arson. For the eighth straight year, statistics show juvenile firesetters account for at least half of those arrested for arson. Close to one-third of those arrested are under the age of 15.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) statistics for November 2003 show that children experimenting with fire started 41,900 fires that were reported to U.S. fire departments, causing an estimated 165 civilian deaths, 1,900 civilian injuries, and \$272 million in direct property damage.

Children experimenting with fire and juvenile arson are a serious national problem. That is why the first week of May (each year) has been designated National Arson Awareness Week, to raise America's consciousness of this most costly of all fires and the steps that are being taken to combat it in communities across the country. This year's theme is "Juvenile Firesetting: The Preventable Arson."

Children often set fires because they are curious, infatuated with fire, mischievous, or wanting attention. Children who start fires may be children in crisis, with the fires acting as cries for help from stressful life experiences or abuse.

About one in every four fires is intentionally set.

State Fire Marshal Mary Corso provides the following: "If you suspect a child of setting fires, notify your local fire department—it may not be 'just a phase' they are going through. Also, if you know or suspect an arson crime has been committed, contact your local fire or law enforcement agency. Each of us can make a difference towards improving the arson problem in Washington."

The Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Washington State Association of Fire Marshals offer the following tips to reducing arson and firesetting opportunities:

- Report suspicious activity near a house or other building to the local police and support Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Store matches and lighters out of the reach and sight of children, preferably up high or in a locked cabinet.
- Never use lighters or matches as a source of amusement for children; they may imitate what you do.
- Keep doors and windows locked when a building is unoccupied.
- Keep leaves, firewood, overgrown brush and shrubbery, and other combustibles away from buildings. Most arson fires are started outdoors. Don't make it easy for a youthful firesetter or juvenile arsonist to start a fire or easy for an outdoor fire to spread to a building.
- Finally, if you suspect a child is intentionally setting fires or unduly fascinated with fire, get help immediately. Your local fire department, school, or community counseling agency can put you in touch with experts trained to help in these matters.

For additional information and brochures on arson prevention, call 1-888-603-3100; visit www.usfa.fema.gov; or contact the Office of the State Fire Marshal or your local fire department.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is a bureau of the Washington State Patrol, providing fire and life safety services to the citizens of Washington State, including inspections of state-licensed facilities, plan review of fire protection systems and school construction projects, licensing of fire sprinkler contractors and pyrotechnic operators, training Washington State's firefighters, and collecting emergency response data. For additional information, you may visit our Web page at www.wsp.wa.gov and then click on "State Fire Marshal."

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